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Macedonia in Iraq

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Background:

Macedonia supports both OIF and OEF with troops, and they have continued to increase their participation in Iraq since June 2003. Macedonia currently has 48 troops in Iraq, including a 33-man special operations platoon. Several Macedonian soldiers have been awarded US medals for their conduct in Iraq. The platoon is embedded with a U.S. engineer battalion stationed in Taji, in MND-Baghdad; the Macedonians will be eager to remain embedded with U.S. forces in the future. The current mandate for these troops, renewed every six months, expires again in June. We expect this seventh rotation to be renewed without difficulty. Likewise, we do not expect the deployment to Iraq to play a significant role in the Macedonian parliamentary elections likely in late June or July. Macedonia was the first to volunteer trainers (12) for CENTCOM's proposed military assistance training concept in Iraq. Macedonia has also offered to train Iraqi officials and to help draft the Iraqi constitution. While there have been no Macedonian troop casualties, in autumn 2004, three Macedonian civilians were kidnapped in Baghdad and killed. Macedonia does not have diplomatic relations with Iraq. Outside Iraq, Macedonia supports ISAF with 33 troops, including an Infantry Platoon, medical personnel and staff officers. Given its limited resources, Macedonia has not made any financial pledges. Public opinion has remained largely supportive of Macedonia's GWOT deployments. Macedonia holds US\$300 million in Iraqi debt.

Talking Points:

- Thank you for your consistent commitment to stability in Iraq and Afghanistan. GOM military contribution has been invaluable to security in MND-Baghdad since June 2003. Exemplary performance by Macedonian forces.
- Want to present to you our vision of international support to Iraq in 2006 and into 2007, and we want Macedonia to be part of that vision. (S/I presentation)
- Iraq at crucial turning point: first full-term government being formed. Crucial that we maintain international support to help Iraq succeed.

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- Encourage you to stay the course with your troop deployment through 2006 and into 2007.

Watch Out For:

The case of Khalid el-Masri, a German citizen of Lebanese descent who claims he was flown by the CIA from Macedonia to Afghanistan for interrogation, has generated intense press commentary in Macedonia, most of it negative, over the past several months. Opposition parties and opinion-shapers have accused the government of jeopardizing Macedonia's EU accession chances by refusing to comprehensively answer Council of Europe and European Parliament requests for a full accounting in the case. Relevant government authorities have responded carefully to COE and EU requests for information, consistently explaining that they have little information to provide on el-Masri and his allegations. There has been some mention in the press of alleged secret CIA prisons on Macedonian soil, but those stories have not had the same staying power as the el-Masri case.

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